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ABSTRACT

This history of the Statue of Liberty begins with its dedication on October 28, 1886. The statue's roots are then traced back to France in 1865 when the idea for such a monument was first conceived. The efforts of the sculptor, Frederick Auguste Bartholdi, and the construction of the statue are detailed as well as the difficulties Americans had in raising funds for the building of its base. Following an account of the statue's arrival in New York, the article ends with the famous inscription which was added in 1903. (DC)

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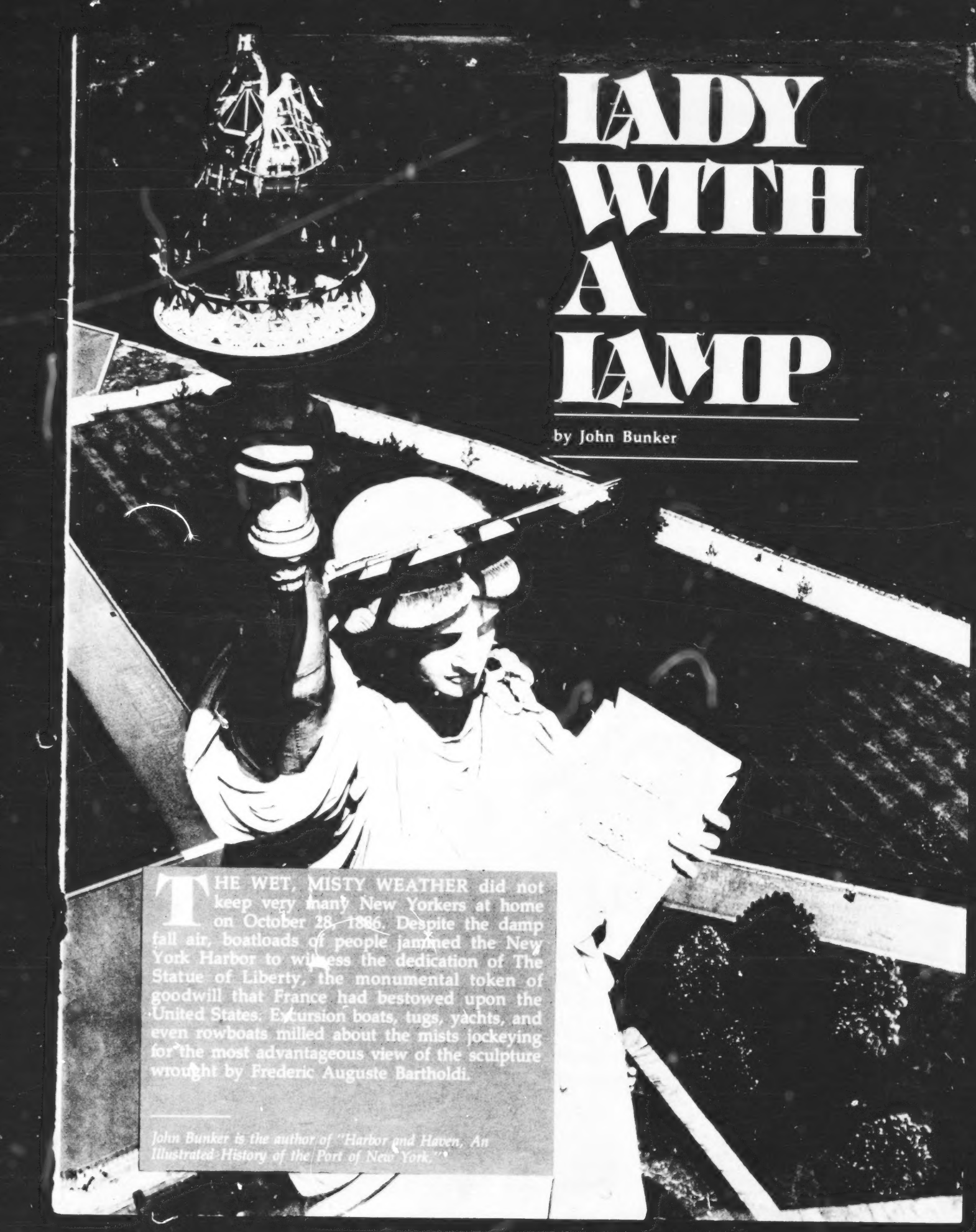
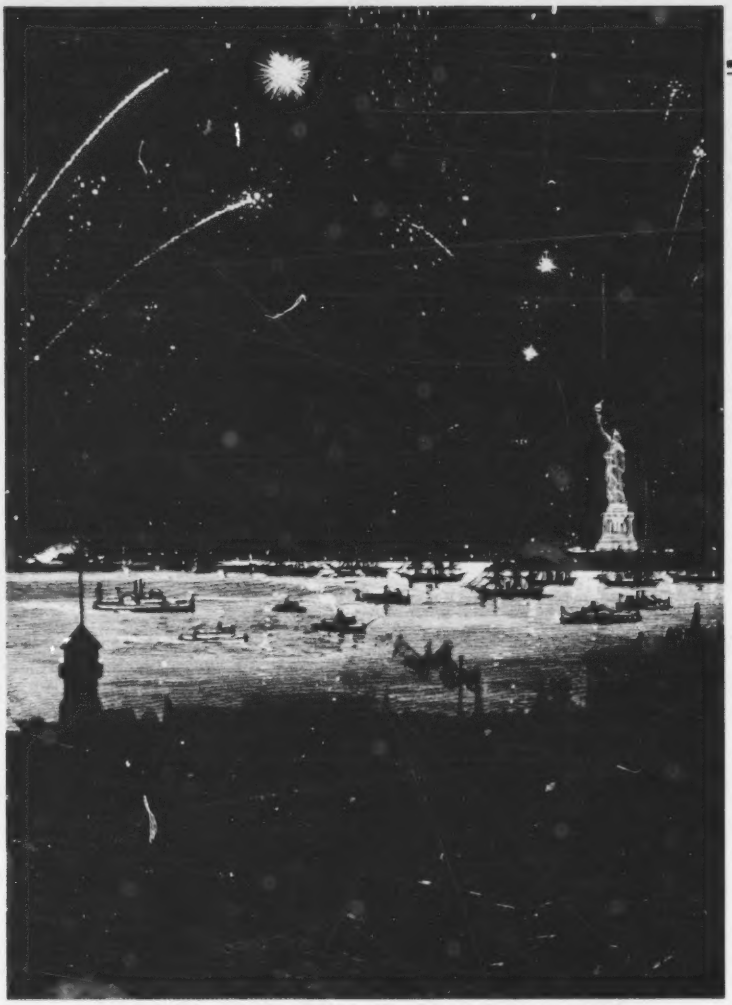


LADY WITH A LAMP

by John Bunker

THE WET, MISTY WEATHER did not keep very many New Yorkers at home on October 28, 1886. Despite the damp fall air, boatloads of people jammed the New York Harbor to witness the dedication of The Statue of Liberty, the monumental token of goodwill that France had bestowed upon the United States. Excursion boats, tugs, yachts, and even rowboats milled about the mists jockeying for the most advantageous view of the sculpture wrought by Frederic Auguste Bartholdi.

John Bunker is the author of "Harbor and Haven, An Illustrated History of the Port of New York."



Artist's conception of the nighttime festivities at the dedication of the Statue of Liberty. In fact, fireworks were cancelled because of rain.

HARPER'S, November 6, 1886 / New York State Library

As a booming salute roared from the harbor forts, Bartholdi pulled the rope enabling a huge shroud to fall away from the titanic "Lady with a Lamp," one of the Statue's popular designations during the 1880's. Known then officially as Liberty Enlightening the World, she stood 151 feet tall. In her left hand, she clasped a book with the inscription "July IV MDCCLXXVI." In her right hand, she held aloft a torch, her arm outstretched 395 feet above the water. It was hard to believe from the boats below that each index finger was 8 feet long and each eye measured 2½ feet across. As New York's newest landmark was revealed in all her glory, scores of vessels blew their whistles and rang their bells. *Hail Columbia,* performed by water-borne musicians was followed by a variety of stately French marches.

Although Chauncy M. DePew, United States Senator and railroad magnate, delivered the principal address, President Grover Cleveland's brief speech encapsulated the statue's significance: "Instead of grasping in her hand the thunderbolts of terror and death, she holds aloft the light which illumines the way to man's enfranchisement. We will not forget that Liberty here had made her home, nor shall her chosen altar be neglected."

The next day, stories of the gala ceremonies appeared on the front page of every New York newspaper. *New York World* gave the most detailed account of how the great event had come to pass.

The Lady had been conceived one evening in 1865 during a Paris dinner party at the home of Edouard de Laboulaye, lawyer, historian, and prolific writer. Although he had never visited the United States, Laboulaye's tremendous admiration for this country was expressed through his voracious studies of American government and its constitutional history. Among the other guests was the distinguished sculptor, Frederic Auguste Bartholdi.

During the course of the evening, the conversation turned quite naturally to a discussion of French-American relations. The dinner guests spoke of the two nations and the close bond that had resulted from common political philosophies and from France's aid to the colonies during the American Revolution. It was suggested that a monument be erected to commemorate French-American friendship and their mutual feelings for democracy and human rights. Before the idea could be transformed into a reality, the Franco-Prussian War, with its humiliating defeat of the French, intervened in 1870–71.

After the war, Bartholdi came to the United States. On a tour of New York, Boston, San Francisco, and other parts of the nation, he met many of America's political, business, and cultural leaders, including President Grant. The idea of a monument was discussed with them. But even before Bartholdi disembarked in Manhatta , he recognized the perfect location for the sculpture. Steaming into New York Harbor, he visualized the monument on an island in the middle of the bay, where every arriving and departing traveler could see it. The mound of land that inspired him was Bedloes Island, then a site of United States Army Fort Wood, now known as Liberty Island.

Filled with enthusiasm, Barthoidi returned to Paris with sketches of a proposed monument. Determined, now, to make the idea a reality, Laboulaye, Bartholdi, and other interested French people formed the Franco-American Union. They announced the project to the public and solicited

Frederick Auguste Barthholdi

contributions from the French. As the money came in, Bartholdi began making a succession of models, each larger than the previous one, until he achieved dimensions and proportions befitting the theme.

Bartholdi's workmen then began hammering out thick copper plates and placed them on huge wood frames. Gustave Eiffel, the bridge-builder who would one day build the Eiffel Tower, was retained to construct the intricate steel framework on which the gigantic figure was hung.

While the sculpture was still in process, the completed right arm was exhibited at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia and subsequently in New York City's Madison Square. The arm was then returned to France. The Lady's head and shoulders were exhibited in Paris in 1878.

On July 4, 1884, the monument was formally given to the United States at presentation ceremonies in Paris. The sculpture was then disassembled for shipment to New York.

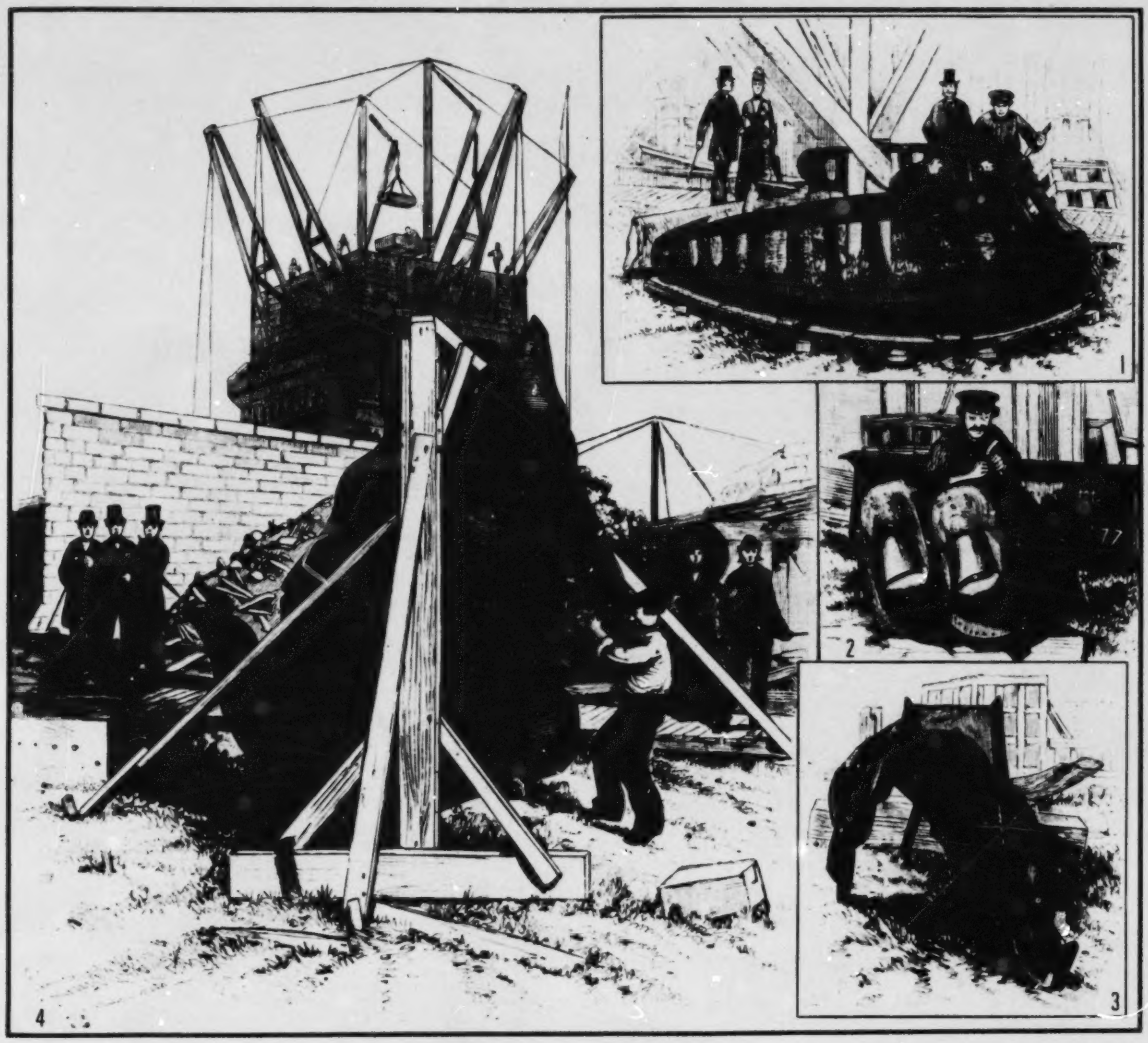
Meanwhile, the American committee which had the task of financing building the huge base for the monument had been having difficulty raising funds. There was little interest in the project outside of New York City. After four years, the Americans had raised only $125,000, about half of the money needed for the foundation and pedestal. When it appeared that the monument would arrive in the United States without a base upon which to put it, Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the *New York World*, adopted the cause. The *World* carried daily articles about the importance of the project and invited all Americans to take part in its completion. The name of every donor was printed in the *World* even if the gift was only a penny. Within a few weeks, the *World* had raised over $130,000. Meanwhile, in France, the statue was put into 214 packing crates and loaded aboard the steamer *Isere*. In June of 1885, the French ship arrived under escort of the entire United States Atlantic squadron. The crates were unloaded and brought to a warehouse.

With sufficient funds at hand, construction of the base designed by architect Richard Morris Hunt was rushed to completion. The packing crates were taken out of storage and moved to Bedloes Island. When the intricate task of assembling the statue was completed, New Yorkers came out en masse for the gala dedication.

Richard Morris Hunt

LESLIE'S, October 17, 1885

National Park Service / United States Department of the Interior

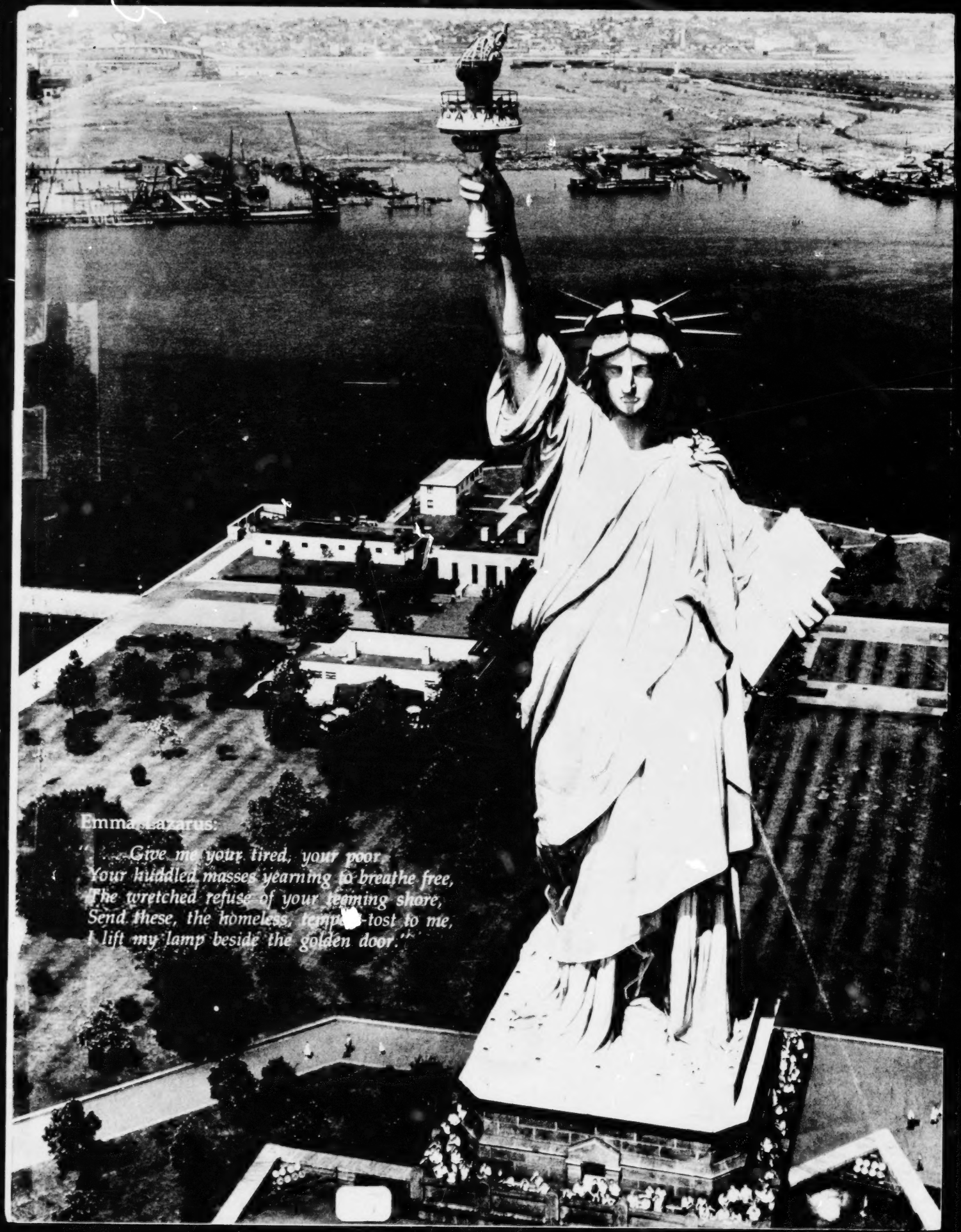


Sketches of progress in assembling the Statue of Liberty on Bedloe's Island: (1) the crown; (2) middle fingers of the left hand; (3) part of the drapery; (4) refinishing the face.

Almost immediately, the response to the Statue of Liberty took on emotional overtones approaching those feelings of patriotism evoked by the American flag. Probably the most stirring view of the Lady with the Lamp was that seen by travelers during the heyday of transatlantic ocean liners. Whether perceived by an American citizen or an immigrant, the sight of the Statue of Liberty from the deck of a ship cruising into the New York Harbor was a heartfelt experience for millions.

Today a visit to the Statue of Liberty continues to be an exciting event for Americans as well as for tourists from foreign lands. A walk up the coiled, 168-step stairway to the observation platform in the lady's 7-spiked crown provides a spectacular view of the New York Harbor and the unparalleled New York skyline. The base of the statue contains The Museum of Immigration.

Over the years, the Statue of Liberty has taken on increasing significance. She is still a symbol of America's friendship with France and their common belief in liberty. But she has also become the symbol of welcome for all who enter the United States, and a symbol of freedom to oppressed people throughout the world. In 1903, this sensibility was embodied by the attachment of the plaque bearing the famous words of


Emma Lazarus:
"... Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door."